

## The Higher Evolution of Man

### Tape 80: Stream Entry: The Point of No Return

Many years ago I spent some time on a sacred mountain in South India and the name of this sacred mountain was *Arunachala*. This is a Sanskrit word and it means the mountain of light. And according to local tradition, according to local Hindu belief, *Arunachala* originally was just this, a mountain of light, an enormous mass of incandescent radiance of pure light, but this was of course many millions upon millions of years ago, way back in the past, in the dim, legendary, mythical, primeval, even primordial past. According to Indian, according to Hindu tradition, this was in the *Satya Yuga*, in the Age of Truth, the first of the four Ages into which Hindus and Buddhists traditionally divide the history of the world. But then, we are told, according to this tradition, a change took place. The Age of Truth lasted a very long time, millions of years, a very beautiful period, an ideal period, a paradise-like period, but eventually, as always happens, it seems, the world deteriorated just a little. It entered upon what the Hindus call the *Treta Yuga*, which is the second of the four Ages, and in this Age, according to Hindu tradition, according to local Hindu belief, *Arunachala* appeared not as a mountain of light any more - it deteriorated too - but as a great mountain, a great glowing pile or heap, of rubies. And then, we are told, the world deteriorated a little more still. It entered upon the *Dvapara Yuga*, the third of the four Ages, and in this Age *Arunachala* appeared merely as a mountain of gold. And of course the world deteriorated even more, things became, we are told, really bad. The world entered then the *Kali Yuga*, the fourth and the last Age. And *Kali Yuga* means the Age of Darkness, and this of course is the Age in which we are living at present. In this Age of Darkness, we are told, *Arunachala* appears as a mountain of stones. The spiritually-minded, however, we are told, still see it not as a mountain of stones, not even as a mountain of gold or rubies, they still see it as a great mountain of light.

I was reminded of all this recently, all this came floating back into recollection, because in these lectures, in this whole course in fact, we have been climbing up the side of a mountain. Perhaps, in a sense, climbing up the side of a mountain - if we did but know it - of light. Week by week we've been making some progress. Progress not on the level, not on the flat as it were, not even up the hypotenuse of the triangle of our first chart. As we saw I think last week, our journey has been rather up the side of a pyramid or up the side of a mountain. And as we also saw last week, the higher we have climbed the less in extent, the narrower if you like, has become the diameter of the mountain, the diameter of the peak up which we have been climbing - in other words, more literally, the shorter the length of time with which we have been concerned. So much so that eventually, as we go up and up, concerning ourselves with a more and more limited period, at ever higher and higher levels, eventually we shall find ourselves standing on a veritable pin-point.

#### Recapitulation

In the first lecture, you may remember, we were concerned with nothing less than the whole evolutionary process, the process of the Lower Evolution, as we called it, the process also of the Higher Evolution. In other words we were concerned with a vast period, a period covering hundreds of millions of years. And we saw that we ourselves, that Man himself, stood right in the centre of this process. We saw that the Lower Evolution revealed what Man had been, whereas the Higher Evolution revealed what he could be, could become, can become.

In the second lecture, we were concerned with a much more limited, a much more restricted period. We were concerned with the whole period of human history, that is to say with a period of about half a million years, in round figures. But especially were we concerned with the Axial Age as, following Karl Jaspers, we called it: that is to say, with the 600-year period from 800 to 200 BC, the great period during which the whole course of the Higher Evolution commenced; the period during which, or the Age in which, emerged the New Man.

Then in the third lecture, we went on to deal with Art and the Spiritual Life, with the Fine Arts, that is to say, in their relationship with and to the course of the Higher Evolution. We saw, you may remember, that the true artist, the artistic genius if you like, was himself a kind of New Man. We saw that he created out of the abundance of his experience or a higher level of being and consciousness than is accessible to the ordinary, to the average man. And we saw, therefore, that the true artist, the creative genius, the artistic genius, occupied a higher place in the scale of evolution.

Then in the fourth lecture we went on to explore the subject of Religion: Ethnic and Universal, and we listed the characteristics of each. We saw that ethnic religion was, amongst other characteristics, on the whole collective and as such belonging to the Lower rather than to the Higher Evolution, even though its branches did extend up into the Higher Evolution. Universal religion, we saw on the other hand, amongst other characteristics was more individual and belonged as such more to the Higher Evolution, even though its roots did go deep down into the Lower Evolution. Looking at the different religions of the world in turn we saw, for example, that Hinduism was a good example of an ethnic religion and Buddhism of a universal religion.

In this way we climbed up the side of our mountain, higher and higher. Last week, for the first time in this series or course, we dealt specifically with Buddhism, and we dealt with Buddhism as the Path of the Higher Evolution. In other words, we were concerned last week with a very high level indeed of the evolutionary process. And you may recollect that we studied the path of the Higher Evolution in terms of the Twelve Positive Links, as they are called in the Buddhist tradition. We saw how the experience of Suffering gives rise to faith, in the sense of a positive emotional attitude towards ultimate things. We saw that faith gives rise to joy, joy to rapture or ecstasy, rapture to peace, peace to bliss, bliss to concentration of mind, of heart, of being; and concentration, in its turn, eventually gives rise to the knowledge and vision of things as they really are. And then this in turn to withdrawal and so on.

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Now tonight we reach, we come to, a higher level still. Tonight we are concerned with an even more limited, an even more restricted, field, at an even higher level. Tonight we find ourselves standing, we may say, right on the top of the mountain, find ourselves in fact standing on a pin-point. And that is because we come tonight to the subject of *Stream Entry, The Point of No Return*. Now this does not mean that our journey is ended. The Zen people have a saying: When you want to climb a mountain, start at the top. But we haven't started at the top, we have started at the base. We have worked our way up now, to the top, to that pin-point, but that isn't the end. We haven't yet reached our destination, haven't yet reached our goal. In any case there are two more lectures and obviously they will have to be filled in somehow. This fact that we have reached the top of the mountain, reached this pin-point tonight, means that tonight we break through into another dimension. And this of course is the dimension of the transcendental; if you like, of the unconditioned; if you like, of the Absolute, Ultimate Reality. It is as though, continuing this particular way of thinking, on the top of our pyramid or our mountain up which we have been climbing, the top of which we've now reached, on the pin-point of which we now stand, it is as though on the top of this pyramid there was another pyramid, standing on top of this first one; but standing not on its base, standing inverted, balanced on its point, the downward-pointing point of the second pyramid balancing on the upward-pointing point of the first pyramid. So that, if one wished, one could as it were pass through the point of the lower pyramid up into the higher pyramid, up inside it, penetrating as though it were hollow into its interior - that is to say, penetrating into a new dimension altogether; the only difference between this second, inverted pyramid and the first pyramid being that whereas the first pyramid has a base as well as a point, this one, the inverted one, has a point but it has no base. In other words, being inverted it has no ceiling. There is only within this second, this inverted, this higher pyramid, there is only the possibility of infinite ascension and infinite expansion, going on to infinity without reaching any base, without reaching any ceiling. However, I am not going to continue with this particular comparison.

I want now to get on directly with the subject-matter of tonight's lecture and I want to introduce a new comparison. And this new comparison will, I hope, make clear what exactly is meant by 'The Point of No Return'. It is something I have often mentioned. I have mentioned it from time to time in the course of lectures but as far as I know, I have never really explained it properly or in detail. So with the help of this new comparison, I hope to be able to throw some light, at least, on this rather obscure and very important, very significant topic. I also hope to be able to elucidate, incidentally, the conception of what I've called sometimes the 'gravitational pull' - this being an expression which has cropped up rather frequently of late, in lectures and discussions.

Now I am going to start by asking you to imagine two bodies, a smaller body and a larger body. If you like, for the sake of convenience, we'll call them the earth and the sun; the smaller body being the earth, of course; the larger one being the sun. But I must point out that what I am going to say is grossly over-simplified, not to say falsified, in the case of the actual earth and the actual sun. So let's take these two bodies, the smaller and the larger, calling them the earth and the sun. Now each of these two bodies is surrounded by a gravitational field; that is to say, is surrounded by an area within which it will attract to itself any other smaller body. Now suppose, carrying our comparison a step further, suppose we so arrange our two bodies, our earth and sun, that their gravitational fields overlap to some extent. Now at this point we are going to look at the blackboard where you'll find, I hope, another chart, another diagram, which I hope will help to make this matter clear.

On the first of these three diagrams, here we have our smaller body, earth. Here we have our larger body, sun. And here, of course, we have the two gravitational fields. So we see that there are now three distinct areas demarcated:

1. There's the area within which there operates only the gravitational force of the smaller body, earth.
2. We see there is an area within which there operates only the gravitational force of the larger body, the sun.
3. Here we see there is another area, a smaller area in the diagram, within which the two gravitational forces - that of the earth and that of the sun - overlap. In other words, an area within which both forces are operative, an area within which, in fact, the two are even in conflict.

Now let us enlarge this section, this area 3, and transfer it to another chart, another diagram. And let's draw a line from point A on this arc to point B on that arc. Also, from our angle C up here to our angle D down there. Now the point of intersection of these two lines within that area (point E), will be the point, we may say, of equilibrium, that is to say the point at which the two gravitational forces - that of what we call the sun and what we call the earth - will balance and will therefore cancel each other out. So that suppose we are travelling along the line A to B. Up to this point of equilibrium we shall be subject more to the gravitational pull of the earth than of the sun. But beyond this point B, beyond the point of equilibrium, we shall be subject more to the gravitational pull of the sun than of the earth. Now if the original impetus behind the object or the person travelling along that line A to B, if the original impetus fails at any point between A and E, then that particular object or that particular person will be pulled back, will fall back, if you like, into area 1. Once, however, we get beyond point E, the point of equilibrium, we are safe. It may take time to overcome the remaining gravitational pull of the earth, but slowly, inevitably, inexorably, we sink - or rise, if you like - into the sun. The first point, therefore, beyond point E is *The Point of No Return*. Actually there is no space in between the two. This is the point immediately following this point, the point of equilibrium; there is only a space on the chart so that you can see this point more clearly. Actually it follows immediately after. So this is the point of no return: the first point beyond the point of equilibrium. It is the point having reached which one could no longer fall back to the earth, even though the earth does still exert, still exercise, some gravitational pull.

Now let's apply all this, let's apply this comparison now, to the subject with which we are concerned tonight. And let us see how it works out in terms of the Higher Evolution, in terms of the spiritual life. Let the smaller body, earth, stand for the conditioned; that is to say, stand for relative existence, stand for phenomenal existence or existence as conditioned by space, conditioned by time, conditioned by causality. And let the larger body, the sun, stand for the Unconditioned, stand for absolute existence, existence beyond space, beyond time, stand, if you like, for the dimension of eternity. So instead now of earth and sun, we have got conditioned and Unconditioned. And each of these two of course, both the conditioned and the Unconditioned, is surrounded by its own gravitational field.

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Now the gravitational field, as it were, of what we call conditioned is known, in Buddhist tradition, Buddhist terminology, as the *samsara*. This is the gravitational field, as it were, of the conditioned. And this *samsara* is depicted in that very well-known work of Eastern Buddhist art, the Tibetan Wheel of Life. Perhaps as I mention this term, some of you can see in your mind's eye, as it were, the Tibetan Wheel of Life illustrating this gravitational field of the conditioned. And you will see it as consisting of four concentric circles:

- the first circle, which is the hub, contains in these pictorial representations three animal figures, figures of a cock, a snake and a pig. These represent craving, aversion and ignorance; or, we may say, more abstractly, represent the forces of attraction and repulsion and the darkness within which these two forces operate.

- the second circle of this Tibetan Wheel of Life is divided into two halves, two equal segments: one white, the other black. These represent the upward and the downward paths within conditioned existence, within the gravitational field of the conditioned itself. In other words, these represent the paths which lead one, on the one hand towards the periphery of the gravitational field of the conditioned; on the other hand, towards its centre.

- the third concentric circle is divided into five, sometimes into six, segments. These five or six segments represent so many planes of conditioned existence and in the traditional, almost mythological, terminology these are the planes of the Gods, of the Asuras or Titans, of Human Beings, of Animals, of Hungry Ghosts and of Beings in States of Suffering. And the human state, our state, comes in the middle. Gods and Titans occupy a higher plane, as it were, while Animals, Hungry Ghosts and Beings in States of Suffering occupy lower planes. In other words, the former states are nearer the edge of the gravitational field whereas the latter are nearer the centre, and Man comes, again, in between.

- now the fourth and the last concentric circle, forming the rim of the wheel, if you like, is divided into twelve segments which represent different stages in the process of the reactive mind. These twelve are traditionally regarded as distributed over three successive lives.

So this is the gravitational field of the conditioned, of *samsara*, and is depicted in the Tibetan Wheel of Life.

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Now the gravitational field of the Unconditioned is known as the *dharmadhatu*. I must apologise at this point for the introduction of an original Sanskrit word. Some weeks ago I promised not to do this; but today I have to break my promise because there is no English equivalent as yet of this word *dharmadhatu*. It's a very important and very interesting one also. *Dharma*, which has many meanings, here means Truth of Reality, in the sense of Ultimate Truth, Ultimate Reality. In other words it stands for the Unconditioned itself. And *dhatu*, which also has several meanings, here means a sphere of operation. In other words, it means 'gravitational field'. So the *dharmadhatu* is, therefore, the gravitational field, the field of operation, of the Unconditioned. The mandala, incidentally, the sacred circle, has the same general significance, especially the mandala of the Five Buddhas - you may remember, the white Buddha in the centre, the green

Buddha to the north, the yellow Buddha to the south, the red Buddha to the west, and the blue Buddha to the east; the Mandala of the Five Buddhas. I have gone into all this before at considerable length and I don't intend going into it again in this place. I am simply pointing out the connection for those who are interested in following it up.

A number of texts in a number of traditions also speak of what is called the *buddhaksetra*. *Ksetra* means field, so *buddhaksetra* is Buddha-field, and it means, it represents, the area within which there operates the influence of a particular Buddha, the spiritual influence, the spiritual power if you like, of a particular Buddha. This influence is often referred to, especially in the Tibetan tradition, as his *adhithana*; an untranslatable word but it can be roughly rendered as 'grace', if we understand by 'grace' simply the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned, of the Absolute. One could also mention in this connection the True Pure Land, again of the Japanese tradition. The True Pure Land too is a symbol of the *dharmadhatu*, a symbol for the gravitational field of the Unconditioned, because the Pure Land, according to its own teaching, is that area within which there operates the infinite light and eternal life of the Buddha Amitabha, the area or the field wherein these two are the dominant force, the dominant influence.

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Now the gravitational fields of the conditioned and the Unconditioned, just like the gravitational fields of the earth and the sun, overlap. That is to say, the Wheel of Life on the one hand, and the *dharmadhatu* on the other, overlap. And this in turn gives us, again, three areas:

1. an area within which operates only the gravitational force of the conditioned.
2. an area within which operates only the gravitational force, or the 'grace' if you like, of the Unconditioned.
3. an area within which both forces operate, wherein they are, in a sense, in conflict.

Now let us draw a line from the conditioned to the Unconditioned and let this line represent the path of the spiritual life, the path of the Higher Evolution - a line from this point in the conditioned to this point in the Unconditioned. This line represents the path of the Higher Evolution. Now this line, when we have drawn it, will pass through the areas which I have mentioned, will pass through area 1, will pass through area 2, and will pass through area 3; though it will pass through them in the order 1, 3 and 2. 1, 3 and 2 here; 1, 2 and 3 here.

Now, this means that the line representing the path of the Higher Evolution, the path of the spiritual life, will be divided into three great sections, and these sections represent the three great successive stages of the spiritual path. In other words:

first, the stage at which there operates the gravitational force of the conditioned;

secondly, the stage at which operate both the gravitational force of the conditioned *and* the gravitational force of the Unconditioned;

thirdly, the stage at which there operates only the gravitational force of the Unconditioned.

Now in traditional terminology these three stages of the Higher Evolution, of the spiritual life, are the stages of:

*Morality*  
*Meditation*  
*Wisdom*

and here, of course, we find ourselves back on very familiar ground indeed. It is like being taken on a long journey round and round, and you think you have strayed very, very far from home, but you take a turning, you take a twist, and you find yourself almost on your own doorstep. So here

we are, we've made this detour, we've gone into quite abstract considerations, but we find ourselves, as I've said, back on very familiar ground indeed. No ground, to the Buddhist, could be more familiar than this: *Sila, Samadhi, Prajna; Morality, Meditation and Wisdom*. But though we find ourselves back on, in a sense, familiar ground, we mustn't forget that old adage, 'familiarity breeds contempt'. Perhaps we find ourselves back on it with a deeper understanding than before, with perhaps some understanding of what these terms (morality, meditation, wisdom) really mean. So let me at this stage say just a word or two on these within the context of the present discussion.

First of All, *Morality*: there is no such word in Buddhism, incidentally. It is equivalent to what traditionally is known as *Skilful Action*. Buddhists in the East don't talk about morals, they talk about skilful action. And skilful actions are actions expressive of what are known as *skilful mental states*: in other words, mental states free from the grosser forms of craving, grosser forms of aversion, and grosser forms of ignorance, and which therefore do no harm either to self or others and which may even, on occasion, benefit them. Now morality in this sense, morality in the sense of skilful action, action expressive of skilful mental states, we may say is of fundamental importance in Buddhism. It is basic. At the same time its value is regarded as strictly limited. Morality, in this sense, in the sense of skilful action, paves the way, prepares the way for the experience of the second great stage, the stage of meditation. But Buddhism insists, and insists again and again, that morality by itself, skilful action by itself, even skilful mental states by themselves, cannot conduct one directly to the experience, to the realisation of the Unconditioned. Morality, we may say, in the Buddhist view, is rather like the launching pad of a rocket. You can't launch the rocket without the launching pad. At the same time, once the rocket is launched, once it goes streaking off into the stratosphere, the launching pad is left behind on Earth; the launching pad doesn't go to the stars. Now morality, skilful action, in Buddhism is not regarded as identical with the spiritual life. Morality is regarded as only part of the spiritual life, only a means to an end, the immediate end being meditation, the ultimate end being Wisdom and even the realisation of the Unconditioned. And incidentally I should mention also that Buddhism distinguishes sharply between two kinds of morality: what it calls *Natural Morality* and what it calls *Conventional Morality*.

The first, *natural morality*, is that which has a psychological foundation which consists of actions expressive of skilful mental states. The second, *conventional morality*, is simply a matter of custom, a matter of opinion, very often very local, and is of no real moral significance.

So by morality in the Buddhist sense, as the first stage of the spiritual path, one means not conventional morality but natural morality. Morality in this sense, morality as skilful action, morality as the first great stage of the spiritual path, the first great stage of the Higher Evolution, corresponds to the white segment, the white half, of the second circle of the Wheel of Life. This white segment leads upwards, leads to the periphery of the circle, the periphery of the gravitational field of the conditioned. But that white segment itself is still inside that gravitational field, still part and parcel of it.

Secondly, *Meditation*: this word is used in all sorts of ways - I almost said 'misused' in all sorts of ways. But so far as we are concerned, it has three meanings and these three meanings of this term 'meditation' correspond to three successively higher levels or stages of spiritual experience.

First of all there is meditation in the sense of *Concentration of Mind*. This is the most elementary meaning of the term. Concentration, or meditation in the sense of withdrawal of attention from the external world. You no longer see anything, your eyes are closed. You no longer hear anything, no longer taste anything, no longer smell anything, no longer even feel, don't even feel the meditation cushion on which you are seated, don't even feel the clothes which you are wearing. Your attention is withdrawn from the senses and because your attention is withdrawn from the senses it is withdrawn also from the corresponding sense objects. Your attention is centred within, not only your attention but your energy, since no attention is going outside, no energy is going outside. Attention is centred within and all the energies, all your psycho-physical energies, are centred within; not only centred but unified, brought together, drawn together, no longer scattered, no longer dispersed, but all centred on one point, vibrating if you like on one

point. And this is the stage, this is the level of *Concentration*. And concentration in this sense is the first of the three meanings of the word meditation, the first level if you like of 'meditation'.

Secondly, there comes what we may call, for want of a better term, *Meditation Proper*. Attention has been withdrawn from the senses, from the external world. The energies have been concentrated within, unified, integrated, gathered together, vibrating on this single point. So in the stage of meditation proper, the energies start to rise. There is a gradual raising, if you like, of the whole level of consciousness, the whole level of being. One is carried up, away from one's ordinary physical body, away out of the ordinary physical universe, material universe, that one knows. One ascends in one's own inner experience up to successively higher and higher states or stages of what we call superconsciousness, when the world becomes more and more distant, when one becomes more and more concentrated, more and more peaceful, more and more blissful; where even mental activity fades away and only great silence, as it were, is left, within which one begins to see, begins to hear with the inner vision and the inner hearing. And these four great stages of superconsciousness are known in Buddhism, of course, as most of you know, as the four *dhyana* states leading ever upward and upward, higher and higher. So this is meditation proper, the middle stage. Not just unification of consciousness, not just unification of one's psycho-physical energies, but the raising of them to ever higher and higher levels of consciousness and being. So that one is living in a different world, one is a different person, a new individual, to some extent.

Thirdly, there comes meditation in the highest, in the loftiest sense of all: meditation in the sense of *Contemplation*. One's mind is concentrated, has been concentrated; energies have been unified, not only that, they have been raised literally higher and higher in the scale of consciousness, of superconsciousness. So next, one as it were turns not just one's consciousness even but one's whole being in the direction of the Absolute, in the direction of the Ultimate, in the direction of the Unconditioned, in the direction of Reality. One can say that one sees it, one has a glimpse of it. One can say that one begins to move towards it, flow towards it, gravitate towards it, begins to feel it, if you like. This, whatever you may call it, is the stage of *Contemplation*, in which this unified, this elevated consciousness, supraconsciousness now, begins to come into contact, describe it how you will, with the Ultimate, with the very depths, with at the same time the very heights of existence and being and consciousness.

Now meditation as the second great stage of the spiritual path consists of what we've called concentration and what we've called meditation proper, just these two. It doesn't include contemplation, which properly belongs to the third great stage of the path, the stage of wisdom. It also corresponds to the first seven positive links. That is to say, corresponds to:

*Faith* arising in dependence on *Suffering*,  
*Delight* arising in dependence on *Faith*,  
*Rapture* arising in dependence on *Delight*,  
*Calm* arising in dependence on *Rapture*,  
*Bliss* arising in dependence on *Calm*, and  
*Concentration* (in the sense of concentration and meditation, that is senses 1 and 2 of the term as just defined) arising in dependence on *Bliss*.

Now meditation, we can see, we can understand, is the middle or the intermediate stage of the spiritual path. Before it comes that of Morality; after it comes that of Wisdom. So Meditation comes in the middle. Meditation is that stage of the spiritual path at which there operate both gravitational forces: the force of the conditioned and the force of the Unconditioned. Meditation is that area, if you like, of our experience within which both of these forces operate. And this accounts, amongst others, for two things:

*First of all it accounts for the ease with which we fall from stage 2 to stage 1.* In other words, it accounts for the ease with which we fall sometimes from what seem the heights of meditation right down into the depths of worldliness. I think most people who practise meditation have had this experience at some time or other. You enjoy perhaps, maybe in the class, maybe during the retreat, or it may be on your own at home, you enjoy what seems to be a really beautiful

meditation. You might even begin to think that you really are getting somewhere; you might even begin to think, well, you've really made it at last, spiritually, after all that striving, all that effort; you've really got up there, you're amongst all these beautiful experiences floating around you like so many pink and blue clouds, and you think, this is wonderful, this is going to stay with me all my life, this is going to stay with me for ever, I'm just up here, floating on these clouds, timelessly, and there's not going to be any further problem, any further worry, any further difficulty. At last I've got there.

But what happens? Within a matter of minutes - not hours, not days, not weeks, but minutes - one is overwhelmed by what one can only describe as highly unskilful mental states. I leave it to you to fill in the blanks, individually. Highly unskilful mental states. Not only that, but we find ourselves even acting in accordance with those highly unskilful mental states, within a matter of *minutes* of floating up there blissfully on those beautiful clouds of our spiritual experiences in meditation. And in this way we oscillate not from side to side but between the heights and the depths, as it were. Sometimes we are right up there with the gods, as it were, thinking, 'I'd like to give my whole life to meditation'; and the next minute we are right down in the depths, really wallowing in it. And sometimes, therefore, we start thinking: Is meditation worth while? With all this effort, with all this trouble, all this exertion, spreading these wings so painfully, up there we get, we soar there for a while, and then ..... flip, flop, our wings seem to give way somehow ..... Crash! we find ourselves back on the earth, maybe a few feathers damaged. This is what happens. So we start thinking, is it worth it? I get up there, only to fall down. I rise only to sink. So is it worth it? If I could get up there and stay there, it would be worth it perhaps. But not to get up there and sink down - it's so disappointing. You begin to wonder whether such a thing as spiritual progress is possible at all, or whether you're not just deceiving yourself and you're doomed just to oscillate in this way, between the heights and the depths for ever.

Now all this trouble is due to the gravitational pull of the conditioned, and we get beyond, we become free from, this gravitational pull of the conditioned only in Stage 3. Not in the stage of meditation, only in the stage of wisdom. Until then, so long as we are only in the stage of meditation, in the sense defined, we are liable to fall, liable to fall at any time, from any height, within that sphere, or amongst those numerous levels of meditation, regardless of the length of time spent in meditation. You might have stayed up there for a couple of hours, even a whole week. It doesn't make any difference. You come tumbling down just as easily.

In India there are lots of stories of this sort of thing, usually stories about Indian Rishis. We are told that Rishi So-and-So thousands of years ago went off to the Himalayas, and he spent thousands of years meditating, meditating in caves, meditating in deep forests, meditating in hermitages, snowy peaks and the rest of it, completely oblivious, indifferent. There are all sorts of wonderful stories how one Rishi's beard grew miles and miles long and went flowing over the whole countryside; and another Rishi had a great ant hill built over him, he was so indifferent to what was going on around he just went on meditating; he thought, this is beautiful, went on meditating for ages upon ages, enjoying these highly blissful states of concentration, meditation and so on. But of course, in the end he had to come out, or at least he decided to come out perhaps, and end his meditation and then what happened? It's the same story every time. According to the legends and traditions which you get in the *puranas*, as soon as the Rishi comes out of his meditation, comes down from the mountainside, emerges from the forest, what happens? He encounters a nymph. He encounters a heavenly maiden. Within a matter of minutes, despite those thousands of years of meditation, he succumbs to her temptations and he's back where he started from. And there are many such stories, there are all sorts of celebrated Rishis, of course in their earlier days.

So what do these stories mean? They all mean one thing. They mean that meditation is not enough, so far as the spiritual life is concerned. It's not enough, but of course it's indispensable. It is the basis for the development of Wisdom, just as morality, in the sense of skilful action, is the basis for the development of meditation itself. I compared, you may remember, morality to the launching pad of the rocket. Now let's continue this comparison. Meditation, we may say, is like the first-stage rocket, from which the second-stage rocket is fired when the first-stage rocket has reached a certain height. And this second-stage rocket, of course, is wisdom. So

meditation is indispensable because it is only from meditation, the first-stage rocket, that you can fire wisdom, the second-stage rocket; not directly from the launching pad of morality itself. So meditation is indispensable. And this means that it must be practised. One must reach a certain level of meditation experience and sustain ourselves at that level if we can, for a certain length of time at least, consolidate it if we can, and then try to develop wisdom, try to release, if you like, our second-stage rocket. And once we've done this, once we've released that second-stage rocket, wisdom, then there is no longer any danger, we're no longer at the mercy of the gravitational pull.

And this brings me to *the second thing accounted for*; accounted for, that is to say, by the fact that at the stage of meditation both gravitational forces operate.

We know that in meditation we sometimes feel a sort of pull. We sometimes feel, if we've been meditating for some time, fairly successfully, we feel as though we were going. We feel as though we were about to slide down into fathomless depths, or we feel as though we're about to be carried away, borne away, by a great stream flowing strongly and powerfully within us and beyond us. And in such cases, sometimes at least, what we're experiencing, what we're feeling, however obscurely, at however many removes perhaps, is the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned. It is that which draws us as it were, that which attracts us as it were, that which begins to pull us as it were, even though we may not be aware of what it is or where it is coming from. But what usually happens? When we start feeling this pull, when we start feeling ourselves going, slipping, sliding, being carried away, we usually resist. We usually pull back. And why is this? We resist, we pull back, because we feel afraid. Oh yes, we say, with our lips, we want Enlightenment, we want Nirvana, but when it really comes to the point, we don't want to be carried away. We don't want to lose ourselves.

This reminds me of a little story that just flashed into my mind. Some of you might have heard it before but it is very apposite here. It's about an old woman in Japan, a very devout old woman, a very devout Buddhist. She used to go along to the temple of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who presides over the Pure Land into which you are supposed to be reborn after death, if you recite his mantra. She would go along to this temple and she would worship there every morning. And she would bow down many times, and she'd say, 'Oh Lord, oh Amitabha, oh Buddha of Infinite Light, oh Buddha of Eternal Light, please take me away. Please take me from this wretched, sorrowful, wicked world. Let me be reborn into your Pure Land. Let me die tonight. Let me be reborn into your Pure Land. That's where I want to go, so that I can be in your presence. So that I can see all day, all night, the Buddha of Infinite Light, and hear your teaching and gain Nirvana.' So in this way, very, very tearfully, and with great sincerity, she used to pray every morning and sometimes in the evening, too. So what happened? A certain monk in that temple overheard her, overheard her a number of times, praying and weeping to be taken away by Amitabha, to be taken away from this wicked world to the Pure Land. So he thought, 'All right, we shall see.' So what did he do? The image in front of which she used to pray and weep, like many images in Japan, was an enormous one, about 20 to 30 feet high. So when the old woman came next, the monk hid behind the image and there was the old woman, praying 'Lord, please take me now, please take me now, let me be reborn in the Pure Land. Let me go, take me.' She was weeping and sobbing, and so on. So the monk, from behind the great image, called out in a great booming voice, 'I shall take you now.' So the old woman leapt up with a shriek of terror, she rushed out of the temple, and as she rushed out she called back over her shoulder to the image, 'Won't the Buddha let me have my little joke?'

So this is how it is. This is how it is. We say that we want to gain Enlightenment, we say that we want Nirvana, and we say, no doubt with complete sincerity, that's what we're meditating for. But as soon as in the meditation we start feeling that pull, so long as we start feeling that we're going, that we are going to be carried away, that we're going to lose ourselves, we draw back just like the old woman; we are afraid. We don't want to lose ourselves. But this is in fact just what we must learn to do, whether in meditation or other aspects, other levels of the spiritual life, we have to learn just to lose ourselves, to learn just to let go, not hold on, not cling on. And this is the most difficult thing in the world, just to let go, to give up if you like. Not give up in the

ordinary, everyday sense, but to give up in the spiritual sense, just, if you like to use more religious terminology, just to surrender to the Unconditioned.

*Thirdly, the third great stage, Wisdom:* this isn't, of course, any kind of mental activity. By Wisdom, in the Buddhist tradition, is meant *direct sustained awareness of Reality or the Unconditioned*. And Wisdom, the third great stage, corresponds to the last five positive links. That is to say:

*Knowledge and Vision of Things As They Really Are* arising in dependence on *Concentration*,

*Withdrawal From the Conditioned* arising in dependence on *Knowledge and Vision of Things As They Really Are*,

*Disgust with the Conditioned* arising in dependence on *Withdrawal*,

*Dispersion* arising in dependence on *Disgust with the Conditioned*,

*Freedom* arising in dependence on *Dispersion*, and

*Knowledge of the Destruction of the Asravas* arising in dependence on *Freedom*.

I am not going to say anything more now about Wisdom because this would carry us too far beyond the *Point of No Return*, which is really our subject tonight. And, in any case, I think the supreme importance of Wisdom is sufficiently obvious.

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So such are the three great stages, three great successive stages of the spiritual path: *Morality, Meditation, Wisdom*. Now the line representing this path, the spiritual path, is intersected by another line, C to D. And the point of intersection of the two lines, that is to say the point of equilibrium, coincides with the point at which meditation ends (meditation in the sense that I have defined it, the first two senses) and wisdom begins. Not that, of course, when one develops wisdom or starts developing wisdom one stops meditating. One is, as it were, superimposed upon the other, and the other continues all the time. And this is also, one may say, the Point of No Return, the point beyond which the gravitational pull of the conditioned is exceeded by the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned. So that the traveller, the pilgrim if you like, is borne inexorably to his goal. Now the traditional term for arrival at this point, the Point of No Return, is *Stream Entry*. That is the term you will find in the Buddhist texts, in the Buddhist scriptures, and hence our title, the title of tonight's lecture: *Stream Entry or the Point of No Return*.

And this term provokes, as it were, a fresh comparison. 'Stream' in the expression 'Stream Entry' corresponds to the irresistible attractive force of the Unconditioned once you've got near enough to it. So let us work out this comparison just a little in detail. It may help to make the whole subject just a little clearer. Let's suppose there is a river flowing, and suppose there is land on this side of the river. So the land on this side of the river represents conditioned existence or the conditioned. And the ocean to which the river is flowing represents the Unconditioned. Now here we are, standing on a certain point on the land on this side of that river. Now we may say that the distance from this point where we now stand, to the water, to the edge of the river, corresponds to the first stage of the spiritual path, in other words the stage of morality; that distance, as it were, from where we stand now to the very edge of the river. Now the distance from the edge of the water, the edge of the river, to mid-stream, this corresponds to the second stage of the spiritual path, that is to say, the stage of meditation. And at mid-stream, once we've reached mid-stream, we begin to feel the mighty force of the current flowing towards the ocean; and we just have to abandon ourselves to it. And this point, in mid-stream, where we have to abandon ourselves to the force of the current, is the point of Stream Entry, the Point of No Return. And the distance from that point to the ocean itself, that's the third stage, in other words the stage of wisdom.

Incidentally, I'm reminded here of one of the parables of Sri Ramakrishna<sup>1</sup>, the great modern Indian saint and teacher. Now he told this parable to illustrate the difference, also the relationship, between grace and work. But it has some bearing on this whole question of Stream Entry as well. Sri Ramakrishna said it is like rowing a little boat right out into the centre of the river, to mid-stream. He said this process, of getting into the boat and rowing with the oars, and with great difficulty making progress to the centre of the stream, mid-stream, this, he said, represents works, *karma* if you like. But he said once you're in mid-stream, you can hoist your sail and once you've hoisted your sail your sail will catch the breeze. So you can rest, you can put up your oars, no further effort is needed. All you have to do is to steer, as the breeze carries you along. And he said this represents grace, the breeze represents grace. In other words, the gravitational force, the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned.

Now we have covered already quite a lot of ground. We've located the Point of No Return. We've understood what Stream Entry is. And perhaps we've begun to understand something of the terrible strength of the gravitational pull of the conditioned, even in our spiritual life, until we've reached the Point of No Return. So it should by now be obvious how very important it is to reach this point, to reach this Point of No Return, to get beyond the gravitational pull of the conditioned. Our ultimate goal, we know, is Enlightenment, is Buddhahood, is Nirvana, whatever else you like to call it. But these really are only words. We say Enlightenment, we say Buddhahood, we say Nirvana, but we don't really know what they mean. We are unable, in fact, to attach any meaning to them at all. They are quite unable to convey to us an adequate idea of the nature of the goal towards which we are supposed to be directing our efforts. This is beyond us. This is too far distant. So our immediate aim, we may say, should be to reach the Point of No Return. This is more comprehensible, even more accessible. And once we've reached this Point of No Return, then Enlightenment, in any case, is assured. According to tradition, once you reach the Point of No Return, the point of Stream Entry, Enlightenment is assured within not more than seven more lives. Of course, one can attain Enlightenment within the same lifetime as one becomes a Stream Entrant, gains the Point of No Return, but even if it takes longer than that it will not take, according to tradition, longer than seven more lives.

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So of course, the question inevitably arises, how is this point, the Point of No Return, to be reached, be realised? And we will now deal, briefly, with this. But before so doing, just a few words on the gravitational pull. The gravitational pull is something we very much need to be aware of. It operates at many different levels. It applies to all aspects of human life. As we saw a few weeks ago, it is owing to the gravitational pull that the artist conforms, or is tempted to conform, tempted even to betray his own inner vision. It is owing to the gravitational pull of the conditioned, again, that universal religions lose their sense of their true mission and become ethnic religions, become a matter of custom and practice and tradition merely. And again, it is owing to the gravitational pull that we sink down from the heights of meditation, even when we've managed to gain them. And it is owing to the operation of this same pull that we stop perhaps coming to the meditation class or fail to make the retreat or even drop out of the spiritual movement altogether. So it is very, very important to observe, to see for ourselves, the workings of this great force, the gravitational pull of the conditioned, to see it, to observe it, to study its workings, both in human history and in our own lives. Because once we see it, once we realise how powerful it is, how ubiquitous<sup>2</sup>, how extensive; then we realise something, we wake up to something; and that is to the fact that we can never relax, that we cannot afford to stop making an effort. If we relax, if we stop making an effort, we don't just remain where we were. At least we don't remain where we were for more than just a few minutes. Because, inexorably, once we relax, once we stop making an effort, once we stop exerting ourselves, the gravitational pull of the conditioned takes over and we start to fall. And before we know what has happened we are back where we started from, maybe months, maybe even years before. We can afford to relax, and then relax only a little, only when we reach or have reached the Point of No Return. Until then, two things are necessary:

- we must be aware, and
- we must continue to make an effort.

There must be no resting on our spiritual laurels, however brilliant. And hence, therefore, the Buddha's last words to his disciples: *appamadena sampadetha* - with awareness, with mindfulness, strive. As if to say, if you manage to keep up these two things, continue being aware, continue to make an effort, then your progress is assured.

All right, now for the question, or back to the question: how is Stream Entry to be attained? One may say there are two ways: there's a positive way and there's a negative way.

The positive way consists in the cultivation of the first seven positive links, up to and including concentration. And it is on the basis of concentration that there arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are. And this knowledge and vision of things as they really are, is not just knowledge in the intellectual sense. It represents a breakthrough into a higher dimension, the dimension of the Transcendental, the dimension of the Unconditioned. And when this breakthrough takes place, one passes, goes beyond, the Point of No Return. One enters the Stream. I dealt with these links in some detail last week, so there is no need to say anything more now.

The negative way of attaining Stream Entry consists in breaking the first three fetters. We will deal with these three fetters and then close. Buddhism speaks of ten fetters binding us to conditioned existence. And these fetters represent, we may say, different aspects, different phases, different stresses if you like, of the gravitational pull of the conditioned. If we break them, if we only break, if we only burst asunder, these ten fetters, then we are instantly transported from the conditioned to the Unconditioned. *Instantly*, on the spot, *we become free*, in the total sense. But it is not easy to break the ten fetters all at once. They usually have to be broken one by one, gradually. Now the ten fetters are:

1. Self-view or self-belief
2. Doubt or indecision
3. Dependence on moral rules and religious observances

On breaking these three fetters one becomes a Stream Entrant, one reaches the Point of No Return. One becomes subject, from now onwards, more to the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned than to the gravitational pull of the conditioned, and as we've seen, one will be reborn not more than seven more times. Attainment of Enlightenment within that period is assured. I'll return to these first three fetters in a moment. Meanwhile we'll continue with the list of ten:

4. Sensuous desire, in the sense of desire for experience in and through the five physical senses
5. Ill-will or hatred or aversion

These two fetters, that is to say sensuous desire and ill-will, are said to be particularly strong. And it is on weakening, not even breaking, weakening these two that one becomes what is called a Once-Returner. A Once-Returner has gone well past the Point of No Return and is even more strongly subject to the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned. The gravitational pull of the conditioned is felt by the Once-Returner comparatively little. He has before him only one more birth as a human being, according to tradition, and will then gain Enlightenment.

On actually breaking, as distinct from merely weakening, fetters 4 and 5, one becomes what is known as a Non-Returner. One is not reborn on Earth at all, one is reborn, according to tradition, in one of the Pure Abodes, in other words reborn near the periphery, near the outermost reaches, of the gravitational field of the conditioned. And the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned is now overwhelmingly predominant. The gravitational pull of the conditioned is felt hardly at all. The Non-Returner gains Enlightenment directly from the Pure Abodes without the necessity of another human birth.

Now the five fetters I have so far mentioned are known, traditionally, as the five lower fetters and they bind one to the plane of sensuous desire, as it is called. In other words, they bind one to the innermost circle of the gravitational field of the conditioned where the gravitational pull is strongest and, as it were, densest.

6. Desire for existence in the plane of form
7. Desire for existence in the formless plane

These are the middle and the outer circles of the gravitational field of the conditioned.

1. Conceit, in the sense of the idea of oneself as superior to, inferior to, even equal to other people

At this stage, this very high spiritual stage, one doesn't make comparisons at all.

9. Restlessness, instability
10. Ignorance, in other words spiritual ignorance in the sense of lack of awareness

These are the five higher fetters and they bind one to the middle and the outer, even outermost circles of the gravitational field of the conditioned. Once they are broken, once the five higher fetters are broken, one is free. One experiences only the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned, one is in fact, oneself the Unconditioned, and there are no more rebirths. Such a person is known, in the traditional terminology, as an *arahant* or Worthy One or Holy One.

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Now back, for a few minutes, to the first three fetters, back for a slightly more detailed explanation. First of all, the *Self-view* or *Self-belief*. This really means one's acceptance of one's present experience of selfhood, as something fixed, unchanging and ultimate. It really amounts to a refusal to accept, really to accept, the possibility of change or progress - refusal to believe that the old self really can be broken up. We are so familiar with ourselves, so used to ourselves, so used to thinking of ourselves in a certain way - we think we are this, this is *me* - we think this is something fixed, final, this will hold good for ever, I'll always be like this, I may change a bit but it will still be recognisably me, very much so, recognisably me. We really refuse to believe that this self, this me, this 'I' as I am experiencing it here and now, can ever be, as it were, consumed as though by fire, so that out of the ashes of that old self a new self can arise. And of course we refuse to believe that this can happen, not once but many times. Self-view is therefore really the negation of the Higher Evolution. It's a sort of rationalisation of the gravitational pull itself. I would say we can distinguish, within the context of our present discussion, four levels of selfhood or four levels of individuality, corresponding to our previous four stages of evolution as mentioned in the first lecture.

You may remember that the first stage was the *infra-human stage*, the second was the *human stage*, both *primitive* and *civilised*, the third the *ultra-human stage*, and the fourth the *supra-human* or *trans-human stage*. These four stages, we saw, in the course of that first lecture, were separated by points 1, 2 and 3 on our first chart: point 1 being the point at which consciousness, in the sense of human consciousness, emerges, and this separates the infra-human from the human stage; point 2 being the point at which self-consciousness or awareness emerges, and this point separates the human from the ultra-human stage; point 3 is the point at which transcendental awareness arises or emerges, awareness of Reality. This is, of course, the Point of No Return and it separates the ultra-human from the supra-human or trans-human stage of development.

Now for the four levels or stages of development of individuality, corresponding to these four stages:

1. the level of *Non-individuality*, where there's no individuality, just existence.
2. the stage of what we may call *Human Individuality*.
3. the stage of *True Individuality*.
4. the stage of *Transcendental Individuality*. That's equivalent to Enlightenment.

Most people are in process of developing human individuality itself. They've not yet even reached true individuality. That will come about only with the emergence of self-consciousness or awareness in the full sense.

Now there is very much that could be said about these four levels of individuality, about non-individuality, human individuality, true individuality, transcendental individuality. But really a whole lecture needs to be devoted to this subject, these four kinds of individuality and perhaps one day I shall do that. In fact there are several topics on which I would like to speak at some time. For instance, there is this very important question that we've been discussing quite a bit lately, of energy, especially energy in the form of positive and negative emotion. But we've no time for all that now, no time in this lecture, in fact no time during the present course. And for the present, we can only enumerate these four levels of individuality and leave it at that. And we enumerate them just to dispel the idea, the false idea, that individuality itself is something fixed, final, ultimately given; that it is not something that can develop, that it cannot die, that it cannot be reborn. So self-belief, the first of the three fetters, we may say, consists in the conviction that human individuality, individuality as we know it in our present stage of evolution, our present stage of development, is the norm of individuality, and that there's no other level of individuality, no other kind. And so long as this belief persists, the whole course of the Higher Evolution is blocked.

Now for the remaining two of the first three fetters, and we'll deal with them much more briefly. The second is, *Doubt or Indecision*. This is not doubt in the intellectual sense, not in the sense of suspension of belief or judgement. Doubt here, indecision, means unwillingness to commit oneself, unwillingness, if you like, to take the plunge. It means holding back when there's no reason for holding back. It means holding back even when one sees good reasons for *not* holding back. And here we may say, with this second fetter, the gravitational pull of the conditioned is at work with a vengeance. There are lots of people who are interested in the spiritual life, interested in the Higher Evolution, interested in Buddhism, come to lectures, come to classes, perhaps for quite a long time; but they won't commit themselves, they won't throw themselves in. At best they'll, as it were, just stretch out their toe and just dip it into the water to feel how hot or how cold it is and then they draw it back. Or even if they do venture in, they like to fasten themselves rather tightly, rather securely, to a good strong post on the shore so they don't get really carried away, and can perhaps have the best of both worlds. They won't throw themselves in. And very often it is because they are just afraid. They agree perhaps with everything that you say, but they won't really accept it, won't really try to put it into practice. This is because they are strongly bound by the second fetter, the fetter of doubt, the fetter of indecision.

Thirdly and Lastly, *Dependence on Moral Rules and Religious Observances*. One could give another whole lecture here but we'll just have to be content with a few, a very few observations. Here it's the dependence which constitutes the fetter. The moral rules are all right. The religious observances are all right, whatever they may be. But it is wrong to be *dependent* on them. Being dependent on them doesn't mean using them and continuing to use them as helps to the leading of the spiritual life. It means being neurotically, even possessively, dependent on them. It means treating them as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. And we may say, even, that a great deal, a very great deal, if not the greater part, of ordinary religious life and ordinary religious activity, conventional religious life and activity, is simply an expression of this fetter, dependence on moral rules and religious observances. And we should be on the lookout for this particular fetter even within the framework of our own Movement. And we should always ask ourselves whether we are not, in fact, continuing to do something not because it's still useful to

us as a group and individually in our spiritual life, but simply because we've always been doing it.

So much for the three fetters, which I've had to deal with, unfortunately, rather briefly. Breaking these three fetters, one attains Stream Entry, one reaches the Point of No Return. Enlightenment, Buddhahood, admittedly is a very distant ideal, but Stream Entry should be a practicable possibility within the present lifetime. And once this has been attained, once this point has been reached, then progress without retrogression is assured. Once this Point of No Return has been attained, then one can only rise higher and ever higher in the scale of evolution, in the scale and on the path of the spiritual life. As one does so, as one rises from level to level, as one gets nearer to the goal, then one will *feel*, as it were, this gravitational pull of the Unconditioned more and more strongly, more and more powerfully. One will, in fact, *see* the Unconditioned, glimpse the Unconditioned, through all the veils, through all the hindrances, through all the obscurations of the conditioned, more and more fully, more and more clearly, more and more brightly. And one may say that as one reaches these stages, as one reaches these heights, then the world itself, formerly a veil, formerly a hindrance, formerly an obscuration, will itself be more and more transfigured; will itself become more and more resplendent, more and more glorious. And to complete our circle, to complete the circle of this lecture, we may say that when we reach this point, when we reach this stage, when we are well on our way to the Unconditioned, then the mountain of stone will become a mountain of gold, and the mountain of gold will become a mountain of rubies, and the mountain of rubies will become a mountain of light, and we shall be one with that light.

Revised May 2002

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**NOTES - Tape 80**  
**(taken from Collins English Dictionary)**

1. **Ramakrishna**, Sri, 1834-86, Hindu yogi and religious reformer. He preached the equal value of all religions as different paths to God.
2. **Ubiquitous**: having or seeming to have the ability to be everywhere at once; omnipresent.

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